

Senator Mary Margaret Haugen

10th Legislative District

Spring 2005



Senator Mary Margaret Haugen

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Committees

- Transportation, Chair
- Government Operations
& Elections
- Rules

Dear Neighbors,

Thank you for the great honor of representing you in Olympia. I appreciate all your feedback and support for my work and the issues you care about.

This was a very productive legislative session. We passed landmark legislation on transportation, health care and education. Best of all, we completed the session by passing a responsible state budget that stepped up funding for critical priorities without any general tax increases.

As chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, I was committed to working in a bipartisan manner to address our pressing infrastructure needs. I developed a strong working relationship with Sen. Dan Swecker, the leading Republican on the committee, and every major transportation initiative the Legislature approved this year had support from both sides of the aisle. I have always said there is no such thing as a Democrat road or a Republican road; we're all in this together.

As I begin to develop my priorities for next year, I hope you can join me for one of my upcoming town meetings. You'll find the dates and locations on the back page. These meetings give us a chance to sit down to talk about the future of our community, and your input will help me serve you better in Olympia.

I enjoyed sharing my thoughts with you this session through my e-newsletter. If you're not on my e-mail list, you can sign up on my Web site: www.sdc.wa.gov/haugen.htm. As we convene next session, I again plan to provide these periodic updates on the issues that interest us all.

Again, many thanks for your comments during the legislative session. Please keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Mary Margaret Haugen

The State Budget:

K-12 education

Kids and schools have always been my top priority, and according to our state constitution, funding public education is the Legislature's paramount duty. I have been concerned about the level of school funding for the past several years, and I fought this year to increase our commitment to the future of the school kids in our local districts and around the state.

This year's budget represents a 10 percent increase in K-12 education funding. We reinstated the voter-approved initiatives on class sizes and wages for teachers, expanded the successful Learning Assistance and Readiness to Learn programs, and boosted funding for



school construction. We must continue to do more to help every student achieve academic success.

Higher Education

Higher education is the single most important factor for people, young or old, to achieve their dreams. I am very concerned about the lack of space at our colleges and universities, and I was proud to vote for an education budget that provides 7,900 additional higher education enrollment slots. The budget also boosts the number of students eligible for financial aid.

Our area is one of the fastest growing in the state, and it is also among the most underserved by institutions of higher education. I am championing a new regional public



four-year college to serve our area, and we are beginning to make headway in this fight. In this year's budget, I secured funding for a major study to document the need for a new college to serve Snohomish, Island and Skagit counties. With the population of Snohomish County estimated to grow by a third in the next 20 years, we must begin to plan for the higher education needs that we know are coming. After all, a good education is the gateway to a reliable, family-wage job.

Health Care

In 2003, the Legislature made a number of policy and funding decisions that resulted in the loss of health care for an estimated 40,000 to 60,000 children. This year, we found the funds to reverse many of those cuts, and now we are working toward the goal of all children in our state having health care coverage by 2010.



Our budget eliminates the premiums for children's health coverage, as well as the administrative barriers that were keeping many children from maintaining enrollment. Currently, through Medicaid, the state provides health care to about 550,000 children.

I was also very excited about the additional funding for nursing homes and the phase-out of the nursing home bed tax. I received dozens of calls and letters about this onerous tax, which has really stuck it to families and nursing homes, and it's about time it went away. This budget reduces the bed tax by 20 percent during the next two years, and we totally eliminate it in over the next six years.

In this year's budget, we also maintain coverage for 100,000 adults in the Basic Health Plan and refrained from imposing medication and transportation co-pays for Medicaid clients.

LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

✓ Performance Audits:

Independent auditors will ensure that state agencies operate efficiently, respond to their customers' needs, provide quality services, and comply with laws and regulations.

✓ Election Reforms:

In response to inconsistencies in vote-counting procedures, confusion about provisional ballots and concern about the voting rights of military service personnel, we passed a series of bills to refine the process, but not erect new barriers against legitimate voters. Washington's counties, which administer the state's polling sites and pay for the majority of the election costs, will also have the opportunity to move to all-absentee elections.

✓ Oil Spill Advisory Council:

This citizens' council, which is not dominated by the oil industry, will review environmental safety issues to enhance oil spill prevention and ensure a rapid response in the event of an oil spill.

✓ Protecting the Environment:

The Legislature adopted several important environmental measures including: reductions in car tailpipe emissions, "green building" standards for schools and government buildings, renewable energy incentives, coordination of the Hood Canal recovery effort, and funding for the clean up of toxic chemicals.

(Continued on back)

Parity for Mental Health

It was a long time coming, but we finally achieved fairness in insurance coverage for those suffering from mental health disorders. Nearly 10 million children and 45 million adults in this country suffer from a diagnosable mental illness. In our state, insurance coverage for mental health has not been on par with other medical care. Co-pays and deductibles for mental health services are higher and there are often limits on the number of times a patient can see a therapist or go to a hospital.

Under this new law, health insurers must provide the same annual or lifetime dollar limits, the same co-payments, deductibles, coinsurance, out-of-pocket maximums, and doctor visit limits for mental health services as for other health services. More than 30 states have already approved this kind of legislation, and experience shows that premiums go up by less than 1 percent as a result.

Strengthening Our Community

Each year, the Legislature identifies key investments to improve the quality of life in our community, enhance



higher education for our students and improve our infrastructure.

The capital budget, as it's called, is all about creating the kind of state in which we all want to live. I was able to secure funding for several projects in our area, including:

- \$5 million to complete essential facilities at Cama Beach State Park.
- \$1.2 million for improvements at Deception Pass State Park.
- \$4.2 million to set aside 400 acres of public land on Whidbey Island.
- \$375,000 for the Arlington Performance Art Center.

Transportation: Getting You There Safely

The transportation package the Legislature passed this year is the single biggest investment in the history of our state's infrastructure. This investment will address our most pressing transportation safety needs and traffic bottlenecks, and will create more than 35,000 new jobs to help speed up our economic recovery.

Every one of us has been touched by the stories of tragic car accidents in our area. As you know, two-lane rural roads are among the most dangerous in the state, and we must invest in these potentially life-saving safety improvements. And we know it's only a matter of time before another major earthquake strikes our area. By strengthening dozens of bridges around the state that are in danger of collapse during a seismic event, we can reduce this significant risk to public safety.

In our area, this package includes major investments along state Routes 20 and 532, including much-needed bridge safety and congestion improvements, as well as funds for a significant interchange upgrade on Interstate 5 at Smokey Point. Washington State Ferries will receive additional funding to replace aging vessels and docks, and new passenger rail stations

will serve commuters from Stanwood and ferry passengers disembarking at Mukilteo. Perhaps most importantly, cities and counties around the state will receive \$1 billion to deal with dangerous rural intersections, congestion on city streets and roads pitted with potholes.

All these great transportation projects will be financed through reasonable user fees. While the oil companies have raised the price of gas by 80 cents in the past year, not one penny has gone to improve transportation in our state. Under this plan, the 9.5 cent increase in the gas tax will be phased in slowly during the next four years. The cost to the average driver will be around \$4.50 a month.

We built strict accountability into this plan, including independent performance audits that will continually gauge whether projects are on time and on budget. Also, by having the secretary of transportation report directly to the governor rather than an appointed commission, we build in more political accountability for the operations of the department.



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LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

✓ Frivolous Lawsuits Against Farmers:

The Legislature created disincentives to filing nuisance lawsuits against agricultural producers, as well as new information about regular farming practices for families who are considering a home purchase near farmland.

✓ Lighthouse License Plates:

Washington's drivers will soon have the option to purchase a beautiful license plate that supports education programs and restoration efforts at Whidbey Island's Admiralty Head Lighthouse and other lighthouses around the state. The Legislature also approved new plates for veterans, members of the armed services, sportsmen, and several other interesting designs.

✓ Celebrating the Orca:

The Legislature has taken the advice of a group of Oak Harbor elementary students and designated the orca as the state's official marine mammal.

Join me at my town hall meetings!

Wednesday, June 15th

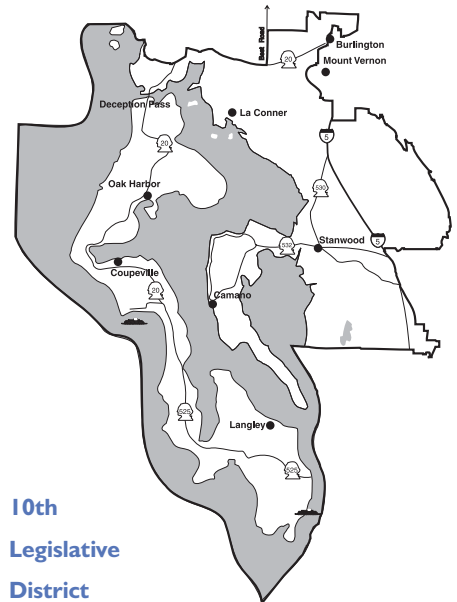
4pm • **Upper Maple Center**
104 Commercial St., La Conner

7pm • **Stanwood Senior Center - Social Room**
7430 276th St. NW, Stanwood

Thursday, June 16th

4pm • **Coupeville Recreational Hall**
901 NW Alexander St., Coupeville

7pm • **Bayview Senior Center - Fireside Room**
14594 SR 525, Langley



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